

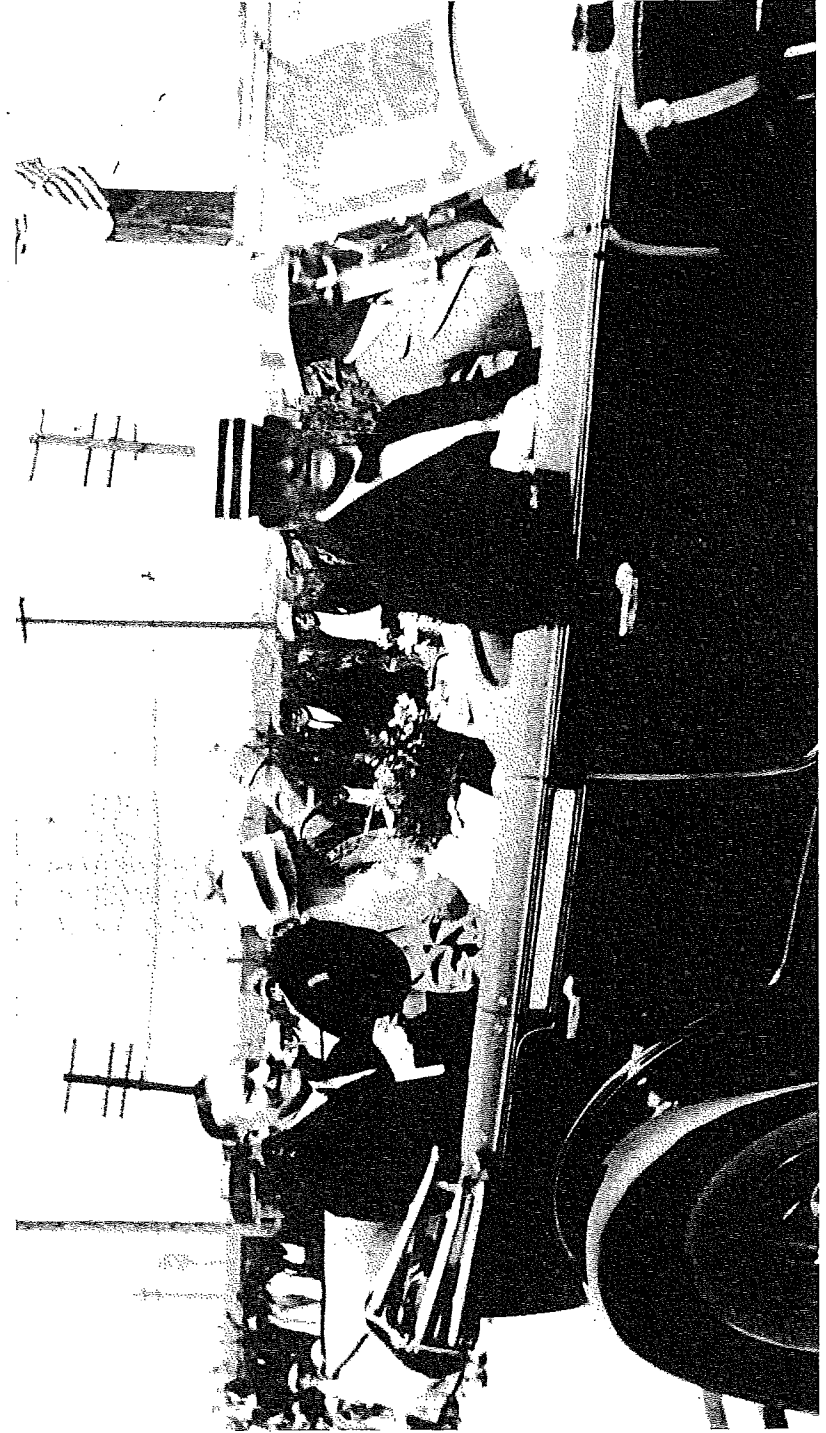
The Real Calvin Coolidge

*An Annual Publication for The Members of
The Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation, Inc.*

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*The Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation, Inc.
Plymouth, Vermont 05056*

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President and Mrs. Coolidge en route to Black Hills for summer vacation in 1927 made a two-hour stop in Indiana to dedicate a 240 acre park as a memorial to the war dead of the Calumet Region of that state.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

In 1983, John Lutz, then President of the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation, planted the seed of an idea that has grown into the publication now before you. President Lutz suggested that the Foundation annually produce for the membership a journal dedicated to publishing articles dealing with Calvin Coolidge, his family and his times. Thus, the first and second issues of this publication were dedicated, thanks to the generous permission of Good Housekeeping Magazine, to reprinting a series of articles that appeared in the publication from February to June of 1935. This issue contains a continuation of that series of articles.

Like all growing ideas, this issue of The Real Calvin Coolidge has been expanded. It is our goal not only to publish articles such as those from 1935 but to add contemporary research and writings on the life and time of Calvin Coolidge. Therefore, in this issue you will find a speech delivered by Victor R. Swenson at Plymouth Notch on August 6, 1978 commemorating the fifty-fifth anniversary of the homestead inaugural. We also included for your information a 1986 article by Foundation Member J. R. Greene titled The Resurrection of Calvin Coolidge which should bring you up to date on new publications and articles dealing with the resurgence of interest in President Coolidge.

But our most innovative addition is our book review section. It is our desire to bring to your attention recently published works dealing with Mr. Coolidge and his times, and in that way help you to expand your understanding of the Coolidge era.

We hope you will approve of our efforts and continue your membership in the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation.

John A. Waterhouse, Editor

*The Following is Reprinted from 1935 Issues of
Good Housekeeping Magazine*

In Defense of a "Foreign" Painter

By ERCOLE CARTOTTO
Portrait Painter

I went to the White House for the first time in the fall of 1927 at the invitation of the President for the purpose, in the words of his fellow alumnus, Mr. George D. Pratt, of painting "the best portrait possible of the President for Amherst College."

The President came to the room in which I was waiting and instantly began to question me. He posed for a preliminary drawing and he talked at the same time. For three hours, divided into two period sittings, he put me through the most uncomfortable time I had ever experienced. My procedure differed from that of other artists who had painted his portrait. He wanted to know why. He questioned me on citizenship, politics, forms of government, religious institutions. I endeavored to answer the avalanche as intelligently as possible while working. Literally "punch drunk," I was drawing the President. It did not occur to me at the moment that he was taking my measure.

At the close of my study the President sent for Mrs. Coolidge. Her coming was like a breath of fresh air. The whole atmosphere changed--and the President also. Both looked at the drawing, and the President said,

"Mr. Cartotto is the first artist who did not create a mouth for me."

Returning to Washington later to begin the painting of the portrait, I saw Mr. Coolidge every weekday for eleven weeks, the sittings ranging from fifteen minutes to any length of time he could give me. I was usually at the White House ready to work at seven o'clock. During the morning sittings the President often dictated, sometimes on speeches, or held conferences. If he gave me any time

during the afternoon, he usually sat perfectly motionless. When my work was finally done to his satisfaction, he sent me an autographed copy of my drawing of him, inscribed, "To Ercole Cartotto with great esteem, Calvin Coolidge." It happened that while I was at work on this portrait there was some agitation, well expressed in the newspapers and elsewhere, concerning the easy access that foreign artists had to official Washington, as against the lack of recognition given to American artists.

One afternoon Mr. Coolidge entered the room in which I was working, accompanied by an American member of the diplomatic corps recently home from Europe. The President introduced me to the gentleman in this manner.

"Mr. X., this is Mr. Cartotto, who has painted and drawn the best portraits of me."

The American minister, hearing my name, said to me by way of greeting, "Italian or American?"

I had started to reply, "American citizen," when President Coolidge answered for me with a single terse word,

"Both."

Mr. Coolidge was aware that my career began in Boston and in New England. Something had been said about my having reversed the usual process by coming to the United States to study, rather than going to Europe, as many Americans have done. Finally, the diplomat had directed his question to a naturalized citizen and a former soldier in the United States Army.

Later Mr. Coolidge expressed himself to me a little more in detail. "If you were less considerate of the land of birth," he said, "you probably would not care so much as you do for this country. You can serve this land better and more by bringing to it the best that you inherited."

During the following three years I was to make, beside my numerous sketches, two more paintings of him, one for his fraternity, Phi Gamma Delta, another for the State House of Vermont.

Thus I was privileged to know him gradually as the humane, friendly, deliberate, and balanced person that he was--solid as the granite of his state, and yet as gentle a human being, free from all frills and veneer, as one could meet. For example, when it was not possible for me to leave Washington for a week-end visit with my family, he

sent flowers to my wife.

On one occasion in his library at Northampton, I told him that if people really knew him, it would have been impossible for him to retire. When I referred to "drafting" him, he turned with a gesture of finality toward a row of books containing his speeches.

"Those are *my* works of art," he said, with just a little humor leavening his seriousness. "Every word in them had to be considered for fear of misuse. The drudgery, the attention they required, is too much of a strain to do over again."

Mrs. Coolidge Comments:

President Coolidge had wide experience in sitting for portraits, and he extended it after his retirement. The room at the northwest corner of the White House was converted into a studio when a portrait was in progress, and it seems to me that it was more often in demand in that capacity than as a small bedchamber.

Each artist approached his task in a manner different from the others. I recall that one insisted upon painting under a strong artificial light. Heavy portières were arranged over the two large windows to insure against any possibility of a ray of sunlight entering.

This artist depicted his subject as a fearsome man without a vestige of kindness. I remonstrated with him, asking if he could not make him a little kind. He backed away from the canvas, fixed me with a disapproving eye, and with appropriate gestures explained, "In New York people think of the President so--" he arranged his features to indicate a perfectly spineless individual; then, "I show them *tiger!*" and he looked so fierce that a well-nigh-resistless impulse seized me to turn and flee.

In preparation for his first portrait, Mr. Cartotto made a crayon sketch of the President. While he was at work on this, the President held a morning conference in the studio with General Lord, Director of the Bureau of the Budget. During their discussion a look of resolute firmness came into the lines around the mouth. Mr. Cartotto felt that he succeeded in "catching" that expression in his sketch, and it marked for him the attainment of one of

the objectives for which he had been striving in the development of his art. Later he presented it to me, and it hangs above the fireplace in Mr. Coolidge's study.

Mr. Cartotto made a silverpoint drawing of me. When it was nearly completed, John came down for the Christmas holidays. The artist invited him to look at the sketch. John stood before it in silence for a few moments. On being asked to express his opinion, he said frankly:

"It doesn't look very much like my mother. Why did you make her look so solemn?"

Mr. Cartotto answered, "John, I once saw in your mother's face a look of resignation."

He Saw Beyond Congress

By CHARLES G. DAWES

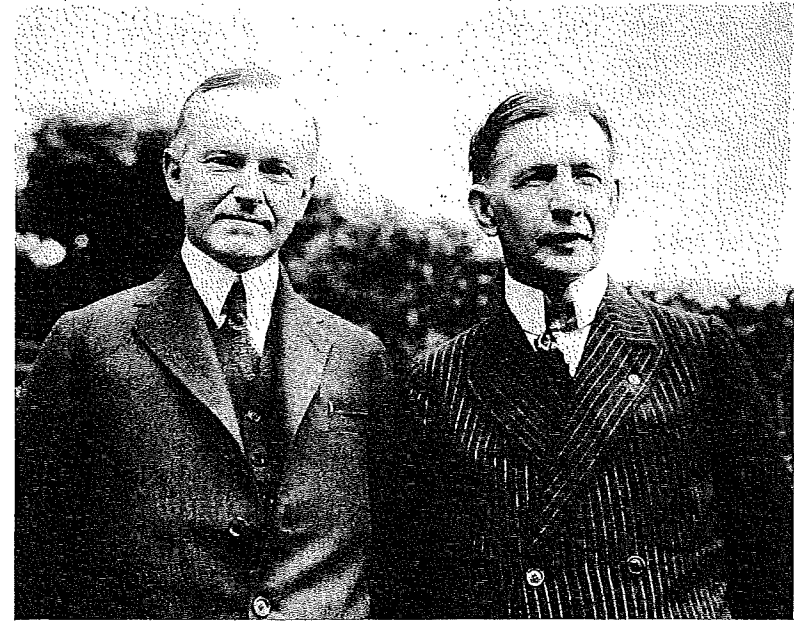
*Former Soldier, A mbassador, and Vice-President
of the United States*

Under a government such as ours and the method provided for the selection of the President, the man who occupies the office, in his temperament, attitudes and characteristics, will well represent generally the inarticulate opinion of the public as to the kind of leadership the country needs at the time.

When Coolidge was elected President, the world desired tranquillity--a reaction of its peoples from the excesses of war. That was the subconscious issue of the elections of 1924 in the United States, England, and France. Where the victory of the conservative party associated itself in the public mind with the prospect of a tranquil future, the conservatives won, as they did in our country with Coolidge and in Britain with the Baldwin government. Where, as in France, the attitude of the conservative party, dominated by Poincaré and his extreme nationalistic Ruhr policy, was regarded as conducive to increased controversy, Herriot and the left were victorious.

What first brought Calvin Coolidge to the favorable notice of our people generally was his action in the Boston police strike, which indicated courage in a period when

growing lawlessness in the country had aroused public opinion.



*The winning team in the 1924 election,
Calvin Coolidge and Charles G. Dawes*

Coolidge personified to our people calmness, high character, common sense with purpose, and splendid courage. The popularity of Coolidge, notwithstanding the opposition he encountered from a Congress nominally Republican, was due to the fact that he, not it, best understood the people, and they him. He was the product of his time.

Mrs. Coolidge Comments:

General Dawes was Director of the Bureau of the Budget when Mr. Coolidge was Vice-President. He and Mrs. Dawes occupied an apartment at the Willard Hotel which corresponded to ours, several flights higher. Because of this we had the privilege of closer acquaintance with

them than with some of the other Government officials and their wives. The friendship which developed outlasted the differences of opinion which sometimes resulted from expediency in matters of state.

Mrs. Dawes and I had much in common, and my only regret was that we were too busy with social affairs which the requirements of our position demanded to see as much of each other as I should have liked.

It was Mr. Dawes' custom to provide an entertainment for his guests after dinner. These were often of too great length to please Mr. Coolidge, who liked to go home early. I enjoyed them, however, and always said good-night with regret that the evening had passed.

"Things I Did Not Say"

By DWIGHT F. DAVIS

Former Secretary of War (D.S.C.)

President Calvin Coolidge was noted for his reticence, although at times, when he was talking to some one in his confidence, or when he had something definite he wished to say, he would talk very freely. As a result, when he did "choose" to talk, people listened attentively to what he had to say. His reputation for silence may have been partly natural, but partly good policy.

I remember talking to him alone one time, just after one of his subordinates had placed the administration in rather an embarrassing position by talking too much. Without mentioning the incident or the name of the individual, but evidently with it in mind, Mr. Coolidge remarked that it was a great comfort to him to feel that he could rely on people who would not talk too much.

"You know, Mr. Secretary," he concluded, "I have found that in the course of a long public life that the things I did not say never hurt me."

Partly at least because of his reputation for talking publicly only when he had something to say, the American people had an unusual degree of confidence in his sound common sense, for which he was noted, and they paid

strict attention to his every word.

Mrs. Coolidge Comments:

Up to the time that we went to Washington I had been a playmate of our boys, entering actively into their sports and amusements. I missed this association more than any other and sought for some form of activity through which it might be continued when they were with us on vacation. After the horses in the White House stables were at our command the boys became enthusiastic horseback riders. I had never ridden, but saw no reason why I should not attempt to learn.

At Fort Myer there was a competent Army instructor. I sought the advice of Mr. Davis, who was then Assistant Secretary of War, and he became my encouraging aider and abettor. After outfitting myself at a local haberdashery I set forth in great secrecy one morning, accompanied by Mr. Davis, for the riding hall at Fort Myer to take my first lesson. Somehow the ever vigilant reporters got wind of what was going on, with the result that there appeared an item at the top of the front page of the morning newspaper, bordered in black and headlined, "Mrs. Coolidge Takes Up Riding."

It had the semblance of a death notice. It certainly resulted in tolling a death knell to my hopes when the President, seated at the opposite side of the breakfast table, unfolded his paper and read of my latest venture.

With a look of surprise mingled with anxiety and disapproval he dashed my adventurous sprit with, "I think you will find that you will get along at this job fully as well if you do not try anything new."

When The President Wept

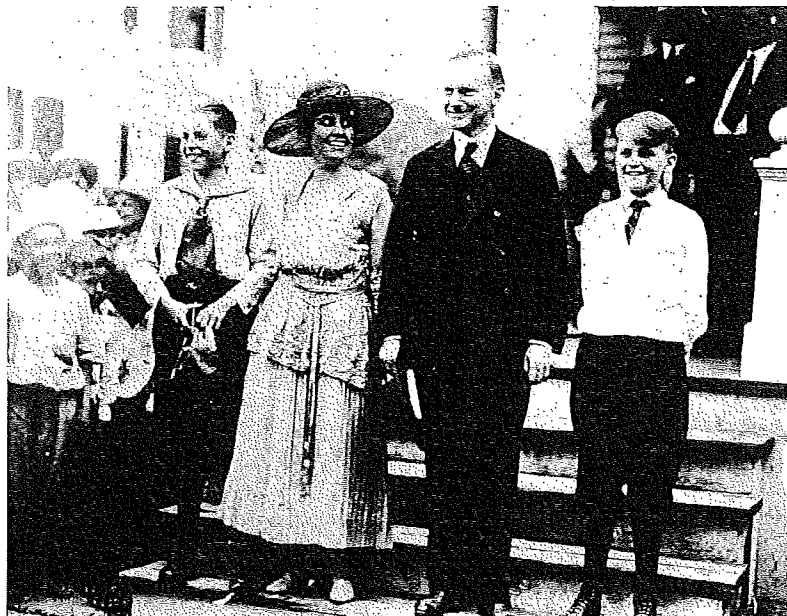
By JOHN T. LAMBERT

White House Correspondent

The death of Calvin Coolidge, Jr., was a great blow to his mother and his father. He was a manly, able, likable

boy, full of fun.

His mother had said of him, "He is a Coolidge, with his mother's disposition."



The Coolidge Family

John, Grace, Calvin and Calvin, Jr., at their 21 Massasoit Street home, Northampton, Massachusetts

I was at Madison Square Garden in New York at the time of young Calvin's untimely death, and I feel now the shudder that passed over the Democratic National Convention when the late Senator Thomas J. Walsh made his sympathetic announcement of it. Upon my return to Washington, I visited Mr. Coolidge at the White House to express simply my sympathy for Mrs. Coolidge and himself in the bereavement that had come to them.

The President was in the Executive Offices. He was seated at the desk, across which he discussed the affairs of the nation and of the world with the officials of Government, the foreign diplomats, the financiers, industrialists and statesmen.

"I am sorry," I said to him. "Calvin was a good boy."

He turned slowly until the back of his chair was against the desk. He faced the wide and beautiful expanse of the south lawn. Beyond it he could see the green eminence which the Washington Monument surmounts. He spoke slowly.

"You know," he said, "I sit here thinking of it, and I just can't believe it has happened." His voice trembled. He repeated, "I can't believe it has happened."

His eyes were moist. Tears filled them. They ran down his cheeks. He was not the President of the United States. He was the father, overcome by grief and by love for his boy. He wept unafraid, unashamed. The brief moments seemed to bear the age of years.

Unwilling to leave his manifestation of grief as the recollection of my visit, I said to him:

"Calvin was a cub reporter for me once. Do you remember it?"

"I think so," he answered slowly, his voice choked by emotion.

"You and Mrs. Coolidge and the boys were at the New Willard," I reminded him. "It was the afternoon of your inauguration as Vice-President.

"I said to John: 'You had a front seat at the inauguration. You saw Mr. Harding and your father, and all the diplomats with their gold braid. I want you to write just what you saw and how it impressed you.'

"John was just in the long-pants stage then, and he had other things on his mind. When I left the suite, Henry Long (he had been Mr. Coolidge's secretary) caught up with me and said,

"'Young Calvin heard what you said to John, and he asked me to tell you that he would like to do it if you would like him to.'"

At this point in my reminiscence Mr. Coolidge turned toward me. The traces of tears were leaving.

"So Calvin wrote the piece," I said. "He described the gold-braided ambassadors and--"

"I remember it," Mr. Coolidge interrupted. A smile had come where the tears had been. It was a smile of joy.

"And Calvin wrote," I said, "that he had seen Mr. Wilson leaving the White House and he thought that was 'too bad'

because he had heard that Mr. Wilson was "a fine President."

"He *did* write *that*?" the President asked. "That was fine. It was like him."

The President smiled broadly, a happy smile, in contemplation of the intuitive, youthful generosity of the boy who had borne his name and the name of his father.

I know as he smiled that the memory of Calvin Coolidge, Jr., the manly, able, likable, *living* boy, full of fun, was with him.

I later sent to the President a photostatic copy of young Calvin's "piece" from the *Boston Sunday Advertiser*. His secretary told me that he read it eagerly. I have heard that the framed portrait of it was always in Mrs. Coolidge's bedroom in the White House.

Mrs. Coolidge Comments:

It seems to me that I have known Mr. Lambert from the beginning of Mr. Coolidge's public service in the state of Massachusetts. He has been a correspondent on different papers during the intervening time, and the Washington representative of one of them when Mr. Coolidge was President.

In general my contacts with members of the press have been casual, as I have maintained a strict policy of giving no interviews; but I have known a few of them more intimately outside of their profession, and I should like to make the statement here that they were unfailing in loyalty. In no instance has one of them betrayed a confidence placed in him through personal friendship by turning it to reportorial account.

Perhaps I should say that I did not have a copy of the article written by young Calvin for Mr. Lambert's paper hanging on the wall in my room. It may have been confused with a photostatic copy of a letter which Calvin wrote in answer to one that he received from a boy of his own age soon after his father became President. We did not know of this letter until after Calvin's death. In part he wrote:

"I think you are mistaken in calling me the first boy of

the land, since I have done nothing. It is my father who is President. Rather the first boy of the land would be some boy, who had distinguished himself through his own actions."

If I were asked to describe New England people in one word, I should choose "thrifty." It is certain that Mr. Coolidge was a notable exponent of that quality, and he instilled it into his children. Calvin came by it naturally, but he disappointed his father once. We were on our way to Poland Springs, where the Governors of the New England states and their families were to be the guests of Governor Baxter of Maine. He had included us in the party, although Mr. Coolidge was then Vice-President.

On the way we spent a night with Mr. and Mrs. Stearns in Swampscott. Mr. Coolidge overheard Mr. Stearns asking Calvin if he had received a present of five dollars which he had sent him as a birthday gift. Boylike, Calvin had neglected to acknowledge it. All the way to Poland Springs the following day, Mr. Coolidge questioned Calvin about what he had done with the money. After we arrived and had been shown to our rooms young Calvin was seated at the desk, given a pencil and paper, and bidden to write down all the things he could remember for which he had spent his five dollars. At dinner time he had not made much headway.

The following day was Sunday, an uncomfortably hot one. We attended service in the chapel. The visiting minister had a long sermon. There was no air stirring. I do not believe that many who were in the congregation followed the discourse closely. After we had left the church and were walking back to the hotel, my husband turned to me and asked,

"Mammy, what was the sermon about?"

"Mercy," I said, "don't ask me!"

"John, what was the sermon about?"

"I don't know," was the answer.

Then it was Calvin's turn. The question was repeated. The boy squirmed uncomfortably, said he didn't know.

"Yes, you do, too," his father told him, and kept at it until, with a shrug of the shoulders, his son murmured,

"Aw, spending money!"

Calvin Coolidge and Vermont: Some Reflections

By VICTOR R. SWENSON
*Executive Director, Vermont Council
on the Humanities and Public Issues*

It is an honor to be with you this afternoon [August 6, 1978] to help you commemorate that night in this village 55 years ago when Colonel John Coolidge administered the presidential oath of office to his son Calvin Coolidge following the death of President Warren Harding.

I am honored, too, to help you celebrate the work of the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation. Following the example of John Coolidge, Aurora Pierce, Florence Cilley and their neighbors, you make visitors and sightseers feel welcome at Plymouth Notch. You help protect the Plymouth Historic District in order to preserve the rural setting of Calvin Coolidge's childhood. And you promote a deeper understanding of the character and career of Calvin Coolidge as son of Vermont, Governor of Massachusetts, and President of the United States. I should add to that, too, the devoted service of Grace Goodhue Coolidge whose charm, grace and loyalty as first lady added luster to the Coolidge presidency.

I am pleased to be here this afternoon to offer some reflections on Calvin Coolidge and Vermont because I think that the Coolidge Foundation and the Vermont Council on the Humanities and Public Issues pursue certain common ends.

We share a sense of reverence for the achievements of past generations and a desire to make historical awareness a deep and fundamental element of our national character. We believe in the constructive intellectual purpose of history and the humanities. Those studies nourish the mind and spirit. They remind us that our times are not unique, that our problems are not unprecedented, and that we have much to be grateful for, and much to work hard

for. A people without a sense of history--without a sense of connection to the past--would be isolated indeed. Americans have tendencies toward rootlessness of that sort. We move around a lot. We are restless and impatient. We need to work particularly hard to retain a coherent sense of our national history and of our place in it.

That is why it is important to be able to reconstruct a sense of what life was like in the days of Calvin Coolidge, and why it is important to have the tangible evidence of Plymouth Notch and the Coolidge Homestead to help us in that creative act of historical recollection.

What did Plymouth Notch and Vermont mean to Calvin Coolidge, and what do they mean to us now?

We can find, I think, some revealing answers to those questions in the character of Calvin Coolidge.

His sense of reserve, of propriety and of civic responsibility reflected his upbringing and education in this community and in Ludlow. He knew the value of hard work and thrift. He was close to the land and to nature. As one who lost his mother and his sister (and later on a son) he knew that life was hard and he valued the sacrifices that family and friends made on his behalf. Coolidge first learned about government from town meeting and about law from the local courts and his father's work as justice of the peace. He knew that self-government is based on self-control, and that free men willingly bear the costs of government for the common good.

But in spite of his rural beginnings, Calvin Coolidge became a sophisticated man. He made his way in Amherst, Northampton, Boston and Washington. He was at ease in the company of men and women of wealth and social prominence. In state and national politics he was shrewd and innovative. He appreciated the value of a good political image. He used the press to good advantage, and was one of the first to exploit the political power of radio.

The best proof of Coolidge's sense of political appearances is the very event we commemorate today. William Allen White points out that according to the Coolidges' travel plans, if President Harding had lived one day longer, the presidential oath would have been sworn not in these homey circumstances, but in the Peterborough mansion of millionaire Guy Currier. What a different image

that would have cast. White says the timing for Coolidge was lucky; and Coolidge knew it. We also know that the Plymouth Notch oath was later judged invalid. A state official cannot swear-in a federal officer. Coolidge took the oath of office a second time in ceremony headed by a supreme court justice, and that ceremony he left unpublicized. It was sufficient for the public to remember Plymouth Notch.

But there was no dishonesty in that. Calvin Coolidge was genuinely a man of two worlds: the quiet, rural, simple world of Plymouth Notch which he returned to visit throughout his life; and the fast-paced, urban world of affairs in which he made a successful public career.

Coolidge was always aware of a sharp contrast between country life, which he characterized as natural and clean, and city life, which struck him as artificial and full of guile.

"Country life," he wrote, "does not always have breadth, but it has depth. It is neither artificial nor superficial, but is kept close to realities." Men spoiled by the pressures of political life, he observed, see everything as artificial and nothing as natural.

To Coolidge, Plymouth Notch was an important place of pilgrimage, not only because of his father and family ties and neighbors, but because of his sense that, when he came back here, he was returning to reality. Simplicity, frugality, hard work and neighborliness: those he saw as the foundations of human existence; all the rest was superstructure. Vermont and Plymouth Notch help exemplify that conception of reality.

The reality of Plymouth Notch is important to us now as it was in the 1920s. Calvin Coolidge served as president at a time of profound cultural turmoil and national transition. The post-war era was fast and rich. Public rejection of prohibition contributed to a widespread sense of cynicism and disrespect for law. The rapid surge of industrialization that followed the development of automobiles, of mass production, of electrification, moved us rapidly away from the realities represented, as Coolidge saw them, by Vermont and Plymouth Notch.

It was extraordinary, in fact, how greatly Coolidge's personal values seemed in conflict with the spirit of his

times. He was principled in a time of cynicism, frugal in time of extravagance, proper in a time of relaxed moral values, and laconic in a time of garrulousness. He seemed during his presidency to embody a set of convictions which the nation as a whole was rapidly discarding. After the Coolidge era--through the depression, the world war, and subsequent decades of prosperity--the march away from those convictions continued. However, his views may be now enjoying a revived importance.

We are in the midst of a national reaction against the excesses of industrial development and commercialism. We are concerned about protecting the natural environment, preserving the values of country life, and restoring a degree of balance between the natural and artificial in our lives.

I don't mean to romanticize the pleasures of pastoral life or to belittle the importance of economic development. Our problems are not simple. And although Coolidge loved Vermont he did not choose to stay in Plymouth Notch. He pursued his career in the cities; but the recollection of the realities of Vermont informed his judgment and his outlook. His life and career represent the importance of both of the worlds in which he moved.

There is a harmony, a balance and a human scale to life in Vermont that is invigorating to us all--to natives, newcomers and visitors--even despite the changes that have affected this state, too, over the past half century. There is a Spartan quality of life here. The climate is hard and is more conducive to character than to luxury. We have not forgotten that freedom means the privilege of citizens to face realities and to impose burdens on themselves. We have the good fortune to enjoy trust, and neighborliness, and simplicity.

It is our hope in welcoming visitors to this community that the example of Calvin Coolidge and Plymouth Notch and of Vermont, will help to strengthen the sense of balance and natural values, that are so important to our national life. We can only applaud your efforts to keep that time and this place vivid in our imaginations.

The Resurrection of Calvin Coolidge

By J. R. GREENE
(Copyright 1986)

*"When it is not necessary to change,
it is necessary not to change."
[Viscount Falkland]*

Calvin Coolidge (1872-1933) was one of the most popular figures in America during his term (1923-29) as the thirtieth president of the United States. He served as an unassuming symbol of, and gave his name to the economic prosperity that coincided with his term.

With the advent of the Great Depression shortly after the end of his presidency, Coolidge's reputation began to erode rapidly. The virtues of thrift, limited government, and sympathy to business interests that seemed so proper during the 1920s made Coolidge an object of ridicule in the 1930s.

As early as 1931, Frederick Lewis Allen's classic Only Yesterday tore at the Coolidge reputation. Allen's book set the tone for much historical writing of the next 50 years about the 1920s. Allen characterized Coolidge as "meager-looking...with a hatchet face...tight lips...pale and diffident." Allen assigns to Coolidge some of the blame for the depression for driving "the prosperity bandwagon with so slack a rein."

An unflattering 1932 biography by Duff Gilfond, entitled The Rise of Saint Calvin, went further to downgrade Coolidge's image. The New Deal era which followed shortly thereafter had a decided influence in pushing Coolidge into a negative obscurity. Political (and therefore most intellectual) thought in a time of "big government" was anathema to everything stood for by Coolidge.

In spite of this obscurity, Calvin Coolidge was the subject of a surprisingly large number of biographies, two of the best appearing during F. D. Roosevelt's presidency. Most of the other books, almost all fauningly favorable,

were written during Coolidge's presidential years.

William Allen White's Puritan in Babylon (his second Coolidge biography) is sympathetic to the man, but disparaging to his policies. Despite a few errors, it became the definitive biography to those who saw Coolidge in a negative light. White's descriptions of Coolidge and his presidency have been quoted endlessly; almost always centering on the negative remarks.

A lesser known counter to White's book is Claude Fuess' 1940 Calvin Coolidge: A Man From Vermont. This book is a bit more scholarly and accurate than White's, but is almost apologetically sympathetic to its subject. A more balanced, but equally obscure definitive biography is Donald McCoy's 1967 book Calvin Coolidge: The Quiet President. It was allowed to go out of print a decade after being published.

Some might be surprised to learn that books of Coolidge's letters, press conference transcripts, syndicated news columns, and his 1928 autobiography (a bland, superficial narrative) are still in print. This alone would indicate some active interest in Coolidge, but there are other reasons for these items to remain in print.

The resurrection of Calvin Coolidge's reputation was to begin outside of academic circles. It fell to magazine writers, and the election of a conservative Republican president in 1980 to launch the still burgeoning Coolidge revival.

Marvin Stone, editor of U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT, was an early Coolidge "revivalist." Stone made Coolidge the subject of several of his "editor's page" columns in the weekly magazine. While initially regarding Coolidge with skepticism in his 1978 column, Stone's attitude showed admiration in the first of five annual "July 4th" columns in 1980.

Stone viewed Coolidge as "a much maligned man," although recognizing that the president was "sometimes painfully obvious" and "not lively enough for critics of his day." Several quotes from Coolidge's speeches and public statements were presented in all five of the columns as examples of his "good sense."

In his 1981 column, Stone pointed out President Ronald Reagan's admiration for Coolidge. Stone called Coolidge

"one of our most inexplicably maligned presidents," who had been "unfairly...victimized by history." After reiterating that Coolidge had "good sense," (the phrase appears in the column's title) Stone presented another sampling of pithy quotes from his hero.

Stone's later "July 4th" columns contained a picture of Coolidge, quotes by him, and a short introduction noting that the president's "homey philosophy...despite its detractors, has worn well through the years."

The effect of these columns cannot be measured. However, their annual appearance in an important business-oriented weekly magazine had to enhance Coolidge's reputation, especially among a naturally receptive readership.

After settling in the White House in 1981, President Ronald Reagan replaced Harry S. Truman's picture in the cabinet room with Coolidge's portrait. Reagan referred to Coolidge as his "favorite" president, and was proud to have his 1981 tax cut measure compared with Coolidge's parsimoniousness. Reagan's attempts to reduce departmental budgets, and ease federal controls on business are also reminiscent of Coolidge's administration. Even Reagan's actions in breaking the air traffic controller's strike have been compared with Coolidge's role in ending the 1919 Boston police strike.

Other parallels between the two administrations included years of low inflation rates, lack of major wars involving the United States, and peaks in the stock market, although it remains to be seen whether the "Reagan Prosperity" is a calm before the storm as the "Coolidge Prosperity" was.

However, not all comparisons to Coolidge's term in office were flattering to Ronald Reagan. As the latter's term generated the largest budget deficits in U.S. history, the tight spending parallel with Coolidge was lost.

In foreign affairs, the interventionist policies of the Reagan administration in Central America, particularly Nicaragua, brought out opinion that such actions were not a highlight of either Presidency. This parallel was noted by many in 1983, particularly by Peter Kornbluh in USA TODAY's September issue. A White House aide quoted in a NEWSWEEK story that summer admitted that the Nicaragua parallel "wasn't exactly what we'd like to con-

jure up in people's minds today." It also proves (along with the deficits) a bit embarrassing to some of the new wave of Coolidge sympathizers among historians.

Late in 1981, NEWSWEEK and TIME, the major weekly news magazines, both ran stories noting President Reagan's admiration for Coolidge. Comparisons between the styles of the two men were made; NEWSWEEK's Peter McGrath feeling that Coolidge would have "approved thoroughly of [Reagan's] lazy, vacation-time Presidency--the rural setting, the phone calls few and far between." McGrath also noted the differences between the two Presidents: Reagan's "enjoying the power of the office, his activism, and sociability."

A 1982 book about Coolidge, though not a biography, became a notable part of the Coolidge revival. Thomas B. Silver's *Coolidge and the Historians* has set the pace for revisionist Coolidge scholarship. Silver uses the analysis of the 1920s by historian Arthur Schlesinger in *The Crisis of the Old Order* (1957) to rebut the "liberal view" of Coolidge and his Presidency.

Silver makes a good case in demonstrating how Schlesinger pulls quotations out of context and manipulates sources to paint a disparaging portrait of Coolidge. Unfortunately, Silver overdoes his defense of the Coolidge-Mellon economic policies, sometimes sounding like an echo of Ronald Reagan's supporters. As Reagan's defenders felt his tax cuts would help stimulate the economy enough to decrease budget deficits by generating additional tax revenues, Silver avoids mentioning the Coolidge-Mellon "hands off" policy toward the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, that allowed too much easy credit for stock speculation on Wall Street. If Silver had at least addressed this issue, instead of using overkill in proving that Mellon did not give dishonest tax rebates to the rich, he might have a more credible defense of Coolidge and Mellon.

August 1983 in his adopted home town of Northampton, Massachusetts, saw a revival of interest in Coolidge. A week of festivities noting the 60th anniversary of Coolidge's assumption of the Presidency included a rededication of the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Bridge (across the Connecticut River) and the memorial room in the Forbes Library, an old fashioned dance and movie showing, a fish-

ing derby, walking tours, an antique vehicle parade, and an "I do not choose to run" road race.

One embarrassing event during the festival was the raiding of a yacht conducting "Coolidge" boat cruises on the Connecticut River. Eighty gallons of alcohol were seized, as there was no permit to serve it. Several commentators noted the irony of this event during a celebration for a prohibitionist president.

To cap off the week, a bust of Coolidge was unveiled on the lawn of the courthouse. Congressman Silvio Conte and John Coolidge (son of Calvin) held a telephone conversation with President Reagan that was broadcast to the crowd.

The "Coolidge Week" was repeated in subsequent years, with a "Coolidge Distinguished Citizen Award" presented each time. In 1984, it was awarded to Congressman Conte and 1985 to Bob Hope. NEWSWEEK noted the 1983 event, using it to reassess the Coolidge image. The NEWSWEEK story quoted from Paul Johnson's book *Modern Times* to present Coolidge as being more "astute" than thought.

Johnson presented an even-handed portrait of Coolidge in his chapter "The Last Arcadia." What Coolidge "did say was always pithy and clear, showing that he had reflected deeply on history...no one...defined more elegantly the limitations of government and the need for individual endeavor."

Another popular general history of the 1920s appearing at this time was fair in its treatment of Coolidge. This was Geoffrey Perrett's 1982 work *America in the Twenties: A History*. In a chapter whimsically entitled "The Great Stone Face," Perrett tries to explain Coolidge's character sympathetically, even ascribing his "dour, sour" expression to chronic indigestion. Perrett tries to see Coolidge as many conservatives see Dwight Eisenhower: a man fitted to the temper of his time in office.

This attitude is also reflected in Donald McCoy's essay on Coolidge in the 1984 compendium *The Presidents: A Reference History*. McCoy points out that Coolidge was "fortunate that his administration faced no great emergencies," although "he met well most of the crises that occurred during his presidency." Coolidge, according to McCoy, "showed outstanding talents as an administrator

and fiscal manager," but was "not outstanding at exercising leadership."

Not all historians have moderated their view of Coolidge. Professor Robert McElvaine, in his 1984 book *The Great Depression: America 1929-1941* sees Coolidge as a negligent president, a major cause of the Great Depression. McElvaine feels that Coolidge was a "Do-nothing" president who deferred to money too often.

In spite of a dissenting voice here and there, favorable books about Coolidge still appear. The strong influence of Amherst College philosophy professor Charles Garman on Coolidge was the subject of a slender 1984 book *Calvin Coolidge Meets Charles Edward Garman* by John Almon Waterhouse. A glossy, heavily illustrated narrative of Coolidge's Vermont years *Return to These Hills* by Jane and Will Curtis and Frank Lieberman appeared in 1985. This slim volume was the subject of much interest when it was reported to be on President Reagan's reading list during his recovery from an operation. Even a biography of Coolidge's son *Calvin Coolidge, Jr. (1908-1924)* by Margaret Jane Fischer was published in 1981.

1985 also saw a one man show about Coolidge performed by actor Jim Cooke. Cooke had been associated with a satirical 1970s play "The Calvin Coolidge Follies," when he began to read about the president. He developed a monologue of quotes from Coolidge, and dressed like him. Ironically entitled "More Than Two Words," Cooke's portrayal is sympathetic, but realistic.

The 25th anniversary of the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation was celebrated in 1985. Headquartered in the president's birthplace of Plymouth Notch, Vermont, the Foundation works closely with the State of Vermont to preserve the buildings associated with Coolidge's early life and retirement in this charming village. By promoting and publishing books, articles, and monographs favorable to the president, it has been an important cog in the Coolidge revival.

Since Coolidge is the latest President not to have a memorial Presidential library, the Foundation and Forbes Library in Northampton, Massachusetts, seek to gather and preserve Coolidge memorabilia and documents. In the spirit of Coolidge's philosophy, the Foundation does not ad-

vocate the creation of a federally sponsored presidential library, as has been done for all of Coolidge's successors.

The latest project of the foundation is the production of a documentary film about Coolidge. This includes a taped interview with John Coolidge. In an age of television and video dominance over reading, the film should prove a strong vehicle in changing the reputation of Calvin in the minds of the general public. Whether most historian and academicians will change their view of Calvin Coolidge remains to be seen.

Book Reviews

Thomas B. Silver, *Coolidge and The Historians* (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press for The Claremont Institute, 1982), 159 pp. \$10.95 paper.

*"We live in an age of science and
of abounding accumulation of material things.
These did not create our Declaration (of Independence).
Our Declaration created them.
The things of the spirit come first.
Unless we cling to that, all our material prosperity,
overwhelming though it may appear,
will turn to a barren sceptre in our grasp."
[Calvin Coolidge, 1925]*

*"As he worshipped business, so he detested government...
Economy was his self-confessed obsession; it was
'idealism in its most practical form'; it was the
'full test of our national character.'"
[Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *Crisis of the Old Order*]*

As a practicing historian myself, I never fully realized just how dangerous a weapon historical partisanship can be, nor how distorted a picture can be painted by the skilled writer with a sloppy disregard for facts or a less than rigorous honesty in his intellectual approach. Nor how much truth can fall between the cracks of two quotation marks. Nor how generations of readers can grow up casually assuming that they know the past which forms the prologue to the world they inhabit, all because of their faith in those regarded as trustworthy scholars. After all, does the Pulitzer committee lie? Do television networks promulgate less than the whole truth, even if the pursuit of ratings might occasionally mar the precise accuracy of a docudrama or newscast?

That I have had my own naïveté shattered is perhaps the

most lasting legacy of Coolidge and the Historians. Thomas B. Silver has written a book ostensibly designed to set the record straight on one of the most misunderstood of Presidents. This he has done, with an impressive attention to detail and a never-failing regard for the record, including what a man in fact said rather than what his enemies at the time or his philisophical detractors since might have us believe he said. Dr. Silver's research is nothing less than breathtaking, his commitment to unbiased analysis total, his knack for wry characterization and telling detail both entertaining and persuasive. But what he has really done with this book, the product of many years of careful thought and extensive digging, is to put an entire profession--his own--in the docket of academic scrutiny. And you don't have to belong to a hanging jury to agree with his verdict of guilty as charged.

Coolidge and the Historians is precisely what its title suggests, a painstaking reveiw of what earlier writers have told us about the thirtieth President, his behavior in such controversial affairs as the Boston police strike of 1919, the effect of his economic and tax policies on post-1929 America, his true beliefs about agriculture and the likely failure of such popular nostrums as McNary-Haugenism, that Farm Belt equivalent of Coue's verbal reassurance, Huey Long's Every Man a King and all the snake oil ever peddled by get-rich-quick artists and traveling quacks. If you want to know Calvin Coolidge in all his subtlety, to place him within the context of his turbulent times, to understand his motives and define the mottos by which he lived, the reader is advised to check out a copy of Claude Fuess' superb biography, first published in 1938. Better yet, he might agitate for a new and still more rounded work, one based upon a mountain of evidence since assembled, not to mention the changed attitudes and broadened understanding which men like Dr. Silver have contributed to.

Still, I can't imagine a better place to begin to rethink all those hoary cliches about Silent Cal, the narrow-minded, cracker-barrel Yankee, Big Business' kept retainer and the Old Guard's true friend. We are reminded, for example, that while Coolidge had few real enemies, he re-

garded reactionary Republican Senators with the same contempt he reserved for self-satisfied Brahmins of Henry Cabot Lodge's stripe (it was Lodge, after all, who first expressed astonishment at the thought of a White House occupant accustomed to life in a two-family house). In a book full of ideas, crackling with wit and vitality, and dedicated to debunking a host of debunkers, Silver not only challenges our fixed notions of Coolidge; he also shakes our complacent faith in the Schlesingers, Commagers, Morisons and others enshrined for most of this century as reliable interpreters and gifted storytellers.

The problem, of course, is that one who can tell a story well is all the more obliged to observe that personal and intellectual humility which is the mark of the truly great historian. Since no one can ever fully know another human being--personal vanities notwithstanding--it is the biographer's unique requirement and special frustration that years of research and his own genuine sensitivity are at best imperfect tools of an imprecise trade. All the more reason, then, for those we look to as our most popular historians to follow elementary standards of thoroughness, balance, and fairness, carefully mixed with an appealing modesty and sense of proportion.

That all these traits are missing from most portrayals of Calvin Coolidge and his historial impact on America is no reason to despair. It is reason to think twice before accepting what is on the written page, to weigh exhaustively the evidence and to ask one's self the methodology used in sifting out biographical wheat from ideological chaff. Most of all, it is an incentive to open most works of history with a healthy skepticism.

One could cite specific instances to buttress my case, enough so as to fill another small volume. Unfortunately, space does not allow for that. I can only hope to stimulate enough readers to wonder for themselves, and then turn to Dr. Silver's book, the Fuess biography, and other works cited throughout the Silver manuscript. Ultimately, it is the reader himself who will make the most lasting historical judgment. For him to do that, however, he must be able to place his trust in those craftsmen whose training and instincts prepare them to present events and portray individuals with as much regard for the truth as fal-

libile human nature permits.

This is the final lesson of Coolidge and the Historians. It is one we should all take to heart. Especially those of us with the temerity, ego, or ambition to class ourselves as professionals in the historical field. Only God can create life. Any human being who thinks himself capable of recreating it with absolute fidelity is guilty of the worst form of hubris. But then, Coolidge, the student of Charles E. Garman, the mystical worshiper of Yankee democracy, the Vermonter who cackled at pretense and who loved the green mountains and scarlet forests around Plymouth; he of all people is no doubt chuckling at his historical interpreters. Coolidge simply does not choose to run contrary to their version of the truth.

Dr. Silver, however, does. And for that, we must all be grateful.

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Rex Alan Smith, The Carving of Mount Rushmore (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 415 pp., illustrated \$19.95 hardcover.

President Coolidge spent the summer of 1927 in the Black Hills of South Dakota with the Summer White House at the Game Lodge in Custer State Park near Rapid City. He was enticed there for health reasons because it had a high altitude, was dry, and free of insects. It was hoped that this climate would be good for his bronchitis. It turned out to be so helpful that a three week vacation extended to three months and the Presidential Party did not return to Washington 'til September.

There was another reason, however, for the Coolidges' visit to South Dakota and it involved a famous American sculptor, Gutzon Borglum, and U.S. Senator Peter Norbeck, Republican from South Dakota and a friend of the President. These individuals were two of the principal actors in the creation of the new national memorial to be

carved on Mount Rushmore; the heads of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt. As a result of his visit, President Coolidge not only gave moral support to the Rushmore monument but he inaugurated the project on August 10, 1927 and in his speech offered federal assistance which was the key to its successful completion. President Coolidge was also asked by Borglum to write a 500 word "essay" to be carved next to the faces on a flat surface copying the map of the Louisiana Purchase. Unfortunately misunderstandings arose and there was a fall out between the sculptor and the President over the text and the latter withdrew and would have nothing to do with the Entablature which was never completed anyway because of financial restraints.



*Black Hills, South Dakota Game Lodge,
used as Summer White House in 1927*

A fascinating book in itself that tells the dramatic story

of the many conflicts regarding funds, staff, administrative control, concept, etc. between Borglum and just about everybody else. It is of even greater interest because of the prominence it gives to President Coolidge's support of the project. Two full chapters as well as numerous additional sections are devoted to the Coolidge relationship and there are nine illustrations of the Coolidge visit. Considerable emphasis is given to Coolidge's successful trout fishing and the importance this had in encouraging the Coolidges to stay longer.

During this visit, in addition to his dedication of the Rushmore memorial, President Coolidge made his famous "I do not choose to run" statement in Rapid City and the day he inaugurated Mount Rushmore he denied the last appeal for Sacco and Vanzetti.

The author made a summary statement of the Coolidge influence as follows: "Calvin Coolidge, born and raised in a backwoods hamlet in the hills of Vermont, liked mountains, small towns, and then people, and privacy. He did not like, among other things, flies, mosquitoes, and curious crowds. He was a rockribbed Republican, suffered from chronic bronchitis, and in 1927 was President of the United States. And if any one of these things had not been true, Mount Rushmore National Memorial probably would never have been created."

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